

**MESSAGE KIT AND METHOD FOR ASSISTING AN AUTHOR IN
CONVEYING A PERSONAL MESSAGE**

BACKGROUND

[0001] Written correspondence has long been used by authors to communicate with others. In addition to letters, people often acknowledge or otherwise commemorate important dates in the lives of their friends, relatives, and significant life partners by sending a message in a greeting card. Other times, when people are separated in distance from one another one of the parties may communicate a brief message with a post card or note card.

[0002] With the creation of distributed networks such as the telephone network and computer networks, written correspondence has lost favor as a preferred method of communication. Generally, people prefer to converse over the telephone, via pagers, and using instant messaging applications operable on computers or wireless communication devices rather than via a letter. These changes in the preferred methods of communicating are an indication to the recipient of a handwritten personal message that the message is from a close relative, a loved one, or someone concerned enough to write the recipient such a message. These infrequent handwritten personal messages are fondly remembered and sometimes the receipt of such a message is anticipated even when the author is no longer capable of writing and sending the message.

[0003] Accordingly, improved ways are needed to convey personal messages from authors to recipients.

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SUMMARY

[0004] One embodiment teaches a method for assisting an author in conveying a personal message. The method includes the steps of providing a message kit, receiving completed items including a personal message and delivery instructions from the kit, storing the completed items until notification of the occurrence of a triggering event, and delivering the personal message in accordance with a preferred receipt date after the occurrence of the triggering event, as directed by the delivery instructions.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0005] The present message kit and method for assisting an author in conveying a personal message, as defined in the claims, can be better understood with reference to the following drawings. The components within the drawings are not necessarily to scale relative to each other, emphasis instead being placed upon clearly illustrating the principles of the present message kit and method for conveying a personal message.

[0006] FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram illustrating an embodiment of a message kit.

[0007] FIG. 2 is a functional block diagram illustrating various tasks performed using the contents provided in the message kit of FIG. 1.

[0008] FIG. 3 is a flow chart illustrating an embodiment of a method for conveying a personal message.

[0009] FIG. 4 is a flow chart illustrating an embodiment of a method for assisting an author in conveying a personal message.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0010] Turning to the example embodiments illustrated in the drawings, FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram illustrating a message kit 100. Message kit 100 includes a plurality of various items that can be used to assist an author of a personalized message to deliver the message to an intended recipient at some future time. Message kit includes a first correspondence medium 110, a recipient envelope 120, a second correspondence medium 130, a first directive medium 140, a second directive medium 150, a confirmation medium 160 and an author addressed envelope 170.

[0011] First correspondence medium 110 is an item that enables an author to convey a personal message to an intended recipient. In the embodiment shown in FIG. 1, the first correspondence medium 110 is one of stationary 112, a greeting card 114, or a postcard 116. In alternative embodiments (not shown), first correspondence medium 110 may be other known or later developed items that enable an author to convey a personal message. While a personal message can be conveyed via a number of alternative media via wireless and wired networks of communication devices, the first correspondence medium 110 retains a more personal nature as contemplated alternative message media enable an author of the personal message to hand write or otherwise scribe the message. Similarly, recipient envelope 120 is provided without marking by a supplier of the message kit 100. The unmarked recipient envelope 120 provides a container for the first correspondence medium 110 that can be addressed in the handwritten or printed script of the author of the personal message.

[0012] In the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 1, second correspondence medium 130 conveys information about the intended recipient of the personal message. For example, recipient information form 132 provides a plurality of labeled fields to record various identifiers associated with the intended recipient. Recipient information form 132 includes labeled fields for recording the recipient's name, address, date of birth, relationship to the author, as well as any special notes or instructions including the author's desires regarding conveyance of the personal message. Note that the recipient information form 132 may further include labeled fields for recording the recipient's telephone number, employer, a preferred email address, and the names and contact information associated with one or more friends to ensure that the intended recipient can be located should the intended recipient relocate after the author writes the personal message and the personal message is delivered to the intended recipient.

[0013] First directive medium 140 informs a fiduciary that the author has entered into an agreement with a holding party to deliver one or more personal messages to one or more intended recipients in accordance with the author's instructions after the occurrence of an author identified triggering event. Fiduciary notification form 142 conveys to the fiduciary the agreeing parties, the subject matter, and the consideration for the holding party's services of retaining, safeguarding, and forwarding the

combination of the first correspondence medium 110 and the recipient envelope 120 in accordance with the author's wishes.

[0014] Confirmation medium 160 informs the author that the holding party has received the combination of the completed first correspondence medium 110 and the recipient envelope 120. Confirmation medium 160 further informs the author that the holding party agrees to retain, safeguard, and deliver or otherwise forward the combination of the completed first correspondence medium 110 and the recipient envelope 120 in accordance with the author's wishes. Author-addressed envelope 170 is provided without marking by a supplier of the message kit 100. The unmarked author-addressed envelope 170 provides a container for the confirmation medium 160 that can be self-addressed by the author of the personal message. The author-addressed envelope 170 provides a convenient mechanism for the holding party to return an acknowledged version of the confirmation medium 160 to the author of the personal message.

[0015] In an alternative embodiment (not shown), the message kit 100 may be provided without an author addressed envelope 170 and the confirmation medium 160 can take the form of a postcard addressed to the author.

[0016] Second directive medium 150 informs the holding party that the author identified triggering event has occurred. For example, holding party notification form 152 conveys to the holding party that the personal message(s) in his possession should be distributed to the intended recipient in accordance with the instructions conveyed via the second correspondence medium 130. Holding party notification form 152 can include a pre-addressed portion such as a postcard addressed to the holding party.

[0017] In alternative embodiments (not illustrated), various combinations of the second correspondence medium 130, the first directive medium 140, the second directive medium 150, and the confirmation medium 160 may be provided in one or more multi-part forms. As each section (i.e., item) is completed, the corresponding part of the multi-part form can be separated from the remainder of the form, forwarded, and processed in accordance with its intended use. Each section of the multi-part form may be color coded or otherwise labeled to assist a recipient of the message kit 100 in completing and forwarding the various portions of the form.

[0018] FIG. 2 is a functional block diagram illustrating various tasks performed using the contents of the message kit of FIG. 1. As indicated by process arrows 1 a message kit supplier forwards message kit 100 to the proposed author of the personal message. Note that in some embodiments, the message kit supplier may be the potential holding party or a party associated with the potential holding party. The author completes the first correspondence medium 110, the recipient envelope 120, the second correspondence medium 130, and the author-addressed envelope 170 as described above. Thereafter, as indicated by process arrows 2, the author forwards the completed first correspondence medium 110, an addressed version of the recipient envelope 120, a completed second correspondence medium 130, the confirmation medium 160 and a completed author-addressed envelope 170 to the holding party.

[0019] Upon receipt of the completed message kit items, as indicated by process arrows 3, the holding party acknowledges the confirmation medium 160 and returns the acknowledged confirmation medium 160 in the author-addressed envelope 170 to the author. The author, having received the acknowledged confirmation medium 160 and as indicated by process arrows 4, forwards the first directive medium 140 and the second directive medium 150 to a fiduciary.

[0020] As described above, the fiduciary in accordance with the message provided by in first directive medium 140 waits for the occurrence of the author identified triggering event. Process arrows 5 and 6 are illustrated with dashed lines to indicate that associated transfers of the second directive medium 150, the first correspondence medium 110 and the recipient envelope 120 occur after identified periods of time.

[0021] When the fiduciary confirms that the triggering event has occurred, process arrows 5 indicate that the fiduciary forwards the second directive medium 150 to the holding party. Thereafter, in accordance with the author's instructions as provided in the second correspondence medium 130 and as indicated by process arrow 6, the holding party determines an appropriate calendar date to mail or otherwise deliver the retained combination of the completed first correspondence medium 110 and the recipient envelope 120 to the intended recipient.

[0022] Any process descriptions or blocks in the flow charts illustrated in FIGs. 3 and 4 should be understood as representing specific functions or steps in the corresponding process. Alternative implementations are intended to be included as set

forth in the appended claims. For example, functions may be executed out of order from that shown or discussed, including substantially concurrently or in reverse order, depending on the functionality involved, as would be understood by those reasonably skilled in the art.

[0023] FIG. 3 is a flow chart illustrating an embodiment of a method 300 for conveying a personal message. Method 300 can be executed by an author of a personal message with or without the contents of message kit 100 (FIG. 1). As illustrated in FIG. 3, method 300 begins with block 302 where an author records a personal message. Next, as shown in block 304, the author forwards the personal message along with instructions to a holding party. The instructions include information associated with an intended recipient of the personal message. For example, the information includes identifying parameters, such as the intended recipient's name and mailing address. Instructions further include an author preferred date for the recipient to receive the personal message. When the subject matter of the personal message is a commemoration of the recipient's wedding anniversary, a birthday, or some other life event, the instructions will include an identifier of the subject matter along with the calendar day that the event occurred (e.g., July 4). In some embodiments, the information may include additional contact information associated with the recipient and/or the recipient's family or closest friends. The additional contact information can be used by the holding party to verify the present address and life status of the recipient before the holding party forwards the personal message.

[0024] Thereafter, as indicated in block 306, the author of the personal message receives confirmation of the holding party's intention to retain the personal message and deliver or otherwise present the personal message on behalf of the author in accordance with the first occurrence of the author's preferred date following notification of the occurrence of a triggering event. Note that a holding party may deliver or release a medium containing the personal message to a delivery service a few days before the author's preferred date for the recipient to receive the personal message to account for expected travel time from a storage facility to the recipient's address.

[0025] As explained above, the triggering event is controlled by the author of the personal message. In some embodiments, the triggering event is the death or inability of the author to compose personal messages. In alternative embodiments, the triggering event is the desire of the author to have the holding party forward the personal message. As shown in block 308, the author instructs a fiduciary of the author's agreement with the holding party and directs the fiduciary to notify the holding party upon the triggering event. The fiduciary may have first hand knowledge of the occurrence of the triggering event. Alternatively, the fiduciary may be contacted and informed of the occurrence of the triggering event.

[0026] Attention is directed to the flow chart of FIG. 4. The flow chart illustrates an embodiment of a method 400 for assisting an author in conveying a personal message. Method 400 begins with block 402 where a supplier and/or potential holding party provides a message kit having a first and second correspondence media, first and second directives, and a confirmation medium. Next, as indicated in block 404, the supplier and/or potential holding party receives the completed first and second correspondence media, wherein the first correspondence medium comprises a personal message to an intended recipient and the second correspondence medium comprises information associated with the intended recipient and instruction(s) concerning storing and handling of the first correspondence medium.

[0027] Thereafter, as illustrated in blocks 406 and 408 the supplier/holding party confirms their intention to comply with the instruction(s) and stores the completed first and second correspondence media, respectively. As agreed, the supplier/holding party retains the personal message until the supplier/holding party receives notification from a fiduciary of the occurrence of a triggering event as indicated in block 410. As illustrated in block 412, when required by the instruction of block 404, the supplier/holding party verifies the accuracy of the intended recipient's present contact information and/or life status. In some cases, a significant amount of time may pass between the functions illustrated in blocks 408 and 410. Consequently, the intended recipient of the personal message may have moved, married, divorced, etc. before the supplier/holding party receives notification of the triggering event. Accordingly, the supplier/holding party collects information regarding life events of the intended recipient as indicated in block 414.

[0028] In accordance with the instruction of block 404 and information confirmed and/or determined as indicated in blocks 412 and 414 (when applicable), the supplier/holding party determines an appropriate date to send or otherwise forward the first correspondence medium including the personal message such that the intended recipient receives the correspondence medium when intended by the author as shown in block 416. In accordance with the appropriate date to send or otherwise forward the first correspondence medium determined in block 416, the supplier/holding party sends the first correspondence medium to the intended recipient in response to the days of the calendar as indicated in block 418.

[0029] While various embodiments have been described, it will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art that many more embodiments and implementations are possible. All such modifications and variations are within the scope of this disclosure and protected by the following claims.